



By Max Lucado

Introduction

The love of a mother for her child . . . is there a love any deeper?

The love of God for his children . . . is there a love any bolder?

Woven through scripture, like the ribbons on a newborn's quilt, are gentle reminders that God's love is like that of a mother: deep, unrelenting, *bold*.

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you . . . (Isaiah 66:13).

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands . . . (Isaiah 49:15-16).

But we were very gentle with you, like a mother caring for her little children . . . (I Thess. 2:7)

A bold love: . . . *the love of a mother . . . the love of the Father.*

Chapter One

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FOR LONGER THAN FOREVER

He had always loved those who were his own in the world, and he loved them all the way to the end. (Jn. 13:1)

Give thanks to the Lord because he is good. His love continues forever. (Ps. 136:1)

Moms, I have a question: Why do you love your newborn? I know, I know, it's a silly question. Indulge me. Why do you?

For months this baby has brought you pain. She (or he) made you break out in pimples and waddle like a duck. Because of her you craved sardines and crackers and threw up in the morning. She punched you in the tummy. She occupied space that wasn't hers and ate food she didn't fix.

You kept her warm. You kept her safe. You kept her fed. But did she say thank you?

Are you kidding? She's no more out of the womb than she starts to cry! The room is too cold, the blanket is too rough, the nurse is too mean. And who does she want? Mom.

She didn't even tell you she was coming. She just came. And what a coming! She rendered you a barbarian. You screamed. You swore. You bite bullets and tore the sheets. And now look at you. Your back aches. Your head pounds. Your body is drenched in sweat. Every muscle strained and stretched.

You should be angry, but are you?

Far from it. On your face is a for-longer-than-forever love. She has done nothing for you, yet all you can talk about are her good looks and bright future. She's going to wake you up every night for the next six weeks, but that doesn't matter. I can see it on your face. You're crazy about her.

Why?

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God, I have a question: Why do you love your children? I don't want to sound irreverent, but only heaven knows how much pain we've brought you. Why do you tolerate us? You give us every breath we breathe, but do we thank you? You give us bodies beyond duplication, but do we praise you?

Seldom.

We complain about the weather. We bicker about our toys. We argue over who gets which continent and who has the best gender. Not a second passes when someone,

somewhere doesn't use your name to curse a hammered thumb or a bad call by the umpire. (As if it were your fault.)

You fill the world with food, but we blame you for hunger. You keep the earth from tilting and the Arctic's from thawing, but we accuse you of unconcern. You give blue skies, and we demand rain. You give rain, and we demand sun. As if we knew what was best, anyway.

We give more applause to a brawny ball-carrier than we do the God who made us. We sing more songs to the moon than to the Christ who saved us. We are a gnat on the tail of one elephant in the galaxy of Africa's and yet we demand that you find us a parking place when we ask. And if you don't give us what we want, we say you don't exist. As if our opinion matters.

We pollute the world you loan us. We mistreat the bodies you gave us. We ignore the Word you sent us. And we killed the Son you became. We are spoiled babies who take and kick and pout and blaspheme.

You have every reason to abandon us.

I sure would! I would wash my hands of the whole mess and start over on Mars. But do you?

I see the answer in the rising of the sun. I hear the answer in the crashing of the waves. I feel the answer in the skin of a child.

Father, your love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn you, ignore you, disobey you, you will not change. Our evil cannot diminish your love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes it. You don't love me less if I fail. You don't love me more if I succeed.

Your love never ceases.

How do we explain it?

The answer is found in the eyes of the mother. Why does she love her newborn? Because the baby is hers? Even more. Because the baby is her. Her blood. Her flesh. Her sinew and spine. Her hope. Her legacy. It bothers her not that the baby gives nothing. She knows a newborn is helpless, weak. She knows babies don't ask to come into this world.

And God knows we didn't either.

We are his idea. We are his. His face. His eyes. His hands. His touch. We are him. Look deeply into the face of every human being on earth and you will see his likeness. Though some appear to be distant relatives, they are not. God has no cousins, only children.

We are, incredibly, the body of Christ. And though we may not act like our Father, there is no greater truth than this: We are his. Unalterably. He loves us. Undyingly. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. (Rom. 8:38, 39)

Had God not said those words, I would be a fool to write them. But since he did, I'm a fool not to believe them. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. But how difficult to embrace this truth.

You think you've committed an act which places you outside his love. A treason. A betrayal. An aborted promise. You think, he would love you more if you hadn't done it, right? You think he would love you more if you did more, right? You think if you were better, his love would be deeper, right?

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

His love is not human. His love is not normal. His love sees your sin and loves you still. Does he approve of your error? No. Do you need to repent? Yes. But do you repent for his sake or yours? Yours. His ego needs no apology. His love needs no bolstering.

And he could not love you more than he does right now.

Chapter Two

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A SATISFIED THIRST

“Mommy, I’m so thirsty. I want a drink.”

Susanna Petroysan heard her daughter’s pleas, but there was nothing she could do. She and four-year-old Gayaney were trapped beneath tons of collapsed concrete and steel. Beside them in the darkness lay the body of Susanna’s sister-in-law, Karine, one of the fifty-five thousand victims of the worst earthquake in the history of Soviet Armenia.

Calamity never knocks before it enters, and this time, it had torn down the door.

Susanna had gone to Karine’s house to try on a dress. It was December 7, 1988, at 11:30 a.m. The quake hit at 11:41. She had just removed the dress and was clad in stockings and a slip when the fifth-floor apartment began to shake. Susanna grabbed her daughter but had taken only a few steps before the floor opened up and they tumbled in. Susanna, Gayaney, and Karine fell into the basement with the nine-story apartment house crumbling around them.

“Mommy, I need a drink. Please give me something.”

There was nothing for Susanna to give.

She was trapped flat on her back. A concrete panel eighteen inches above her head and a crumpled water pipe above her shoulders kept her from standing. Feeling around in the darkness, she found a twenty-four ounce jar of blackberry jam that had fallen into the basement. She gave the entire jar to her daughter to eat. It was gone by the second day.

“Mommy, I’m so thirsty.”

Susanna knew she would die, but she wanted her daughter to live. She found a dress, perhaps the one she had come to try on, and made a bed for Gayaney. Though it was bitter cold, she took off her stockings and wrapped them around the child to keep her warm.

The two were trapped for eight days.

Because of the darkness, Susanna lost track of time. Because of the cold, she lost the feeling in her fingers and toes. Because of her inability to move, she lost hope. “I was just waiting for death.”

She began to hallucinate. Her thoughts wandered. A merciful sleep occasionally freed her from the horror of her entombment, but the sleep would be brief. Something always awakened her: the cold, the hunger, or most often, the voice of her daughter.

“Mommy, I’m thirsty.”

At some point in that eternal night, Susanna had an idea. She remembered a television program about an explorer in the Arctic who was dying of thirst. His comrade slashed open his hand and gave his friend his blood.

“I had no water, no fruit juice, no liquids. It was then I remembered I had my own blood.”

Her groping finger, numb from the cold, found a piece of shattered glass. She sliced open her left index finger and gave it to her daughter to suck.

The drops of blood weren't enough. “Please, Mommy, some more. Cut another finger.” Susanna has no idea how many times she cut herself. She only knows that if she hadn't, Gayaney would have died. Her blood was her daughter's only hope.

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“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” Jesus explained, holding up the wine.¹

The claim must have puzzled the apostles. They had been taught the story of the Passover wine. It symbolized the lamb's blood that the Israelites, enslaved long ago in Egypt, had painted on the door-posts of their homes. That blood had kept death from their homes and saved their firstborn. It had helped deliver them from the clutches of the Egyptians.

For thousands of generations the Jews had observed the Passover by sacrificing the lambs. Every year the blood would be poured, and every year the deliverance would be celebrated.

The law called for spilling the blood of a lamb. That would be enough.

It would be enough to fulfill the law. It would be enough to satisfy the command. It would be enough to justify God's justice.

But it would not be enough to take away the sin.

“... because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”²

Sacrifices could offer temporary solutions, but only God could offer the eternal one.

So he did.

Beneath the rubble of a fallen world, he pierced his hands. In the wreckage of a collapsed humanity, he ripped open his side. His children were trapped, so he gave his blood.

It was all he had. His friends were gone. His strength was waning. His possessions had been gambled away at his feet. Even his Father had turned his head. His blood was all he had. But his blood was all it took.

¹ Luke 22:20

² Hebrews 10:4

“If anyone is thirsty,” Jesus once said, “Let him come to me and drink.”³

Admission of thirst doesn’t come easy for us. False fountains pacify our cravings with sugary swallows of pleasure. But there comes a time when pleasure doesn’t satisfy. There comes a dark hour in every life when the world caves in and we are left trapped in the rubble of reality, parched and dying.

Some would rather die than admit it. Others admit it and escape death.

“God, I need help.”

So the thirsty come. A ragged lot we are, bound together by broken dreams and collapsed promises. Fortunes that were never made. Families that were never built. Promises that were never kept. Wide-eyed children trapped in the basement of our own failures.

And we are very thirsty.

Not thirsty for fame, possessions, passion, or romance. We’ve drunk from those pools. They are salt water in the desert. They don’t quench – they kill.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .”

Righteousness. That’s it. That’s what we are thirsty for. We’re thirsty for a clean conscience. We crave a clean slate. We yearn for a fresh start. We pray for a hand which will enter the dark cavern of our world and do for us the one thing we can’t do for ourselves – make us right again.⁴

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“Mommy, I’m so thirsty,” Gayaney begged.

“It was then I remembered I had my own blood,” Susanna explained.

And the hand was cut, and the blood was poured, and the child was saved.

“God, I’m so thirsty,” we pray.

“It is my blood, the blood of the new agreement,” Jesus stated, “shed to set many free from their sins.”⁵

And the hand was pierced,

And the blood was poured,

And the children are saved.

³ John 7:37

⁴ “It is not sufficient that we merely want righteousness unless we have a downright famine for it . . .” –St. Jerome, quoted in Bruner, *The Christbook*, 142.

⁵ Matthew 26:28, Phillips

Chapter Three

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COME HOME

The practice of using earthly truths is no easy task. Yet, occasionally, one comes across a story, legend, or fable that conveys a message as accurately as a hundred sermons and with ten times the creativity. Such is the case with the reading below. I heard it first told by a Brazilian preacher in São Paulo. And though I've shared it countless times, with each telling I am newly warmed and reassured by its message.

The small house was simple but adequate. It consisted of one large room on a dusty street. Its red-tiled roof was one of many in this poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the Brazilian village. It was a comfortable home. Maria and her daughter, Christina, had done what they could to add color to the gray walls and warmth to the hard dirt floor: an old calendar, a faded photograph of a relative, a wooden crucifix. The furnishings were modest: a pallet on either side of the room, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove.

Maria's husband had died when Christina was an infant. The young mother, stubbornly refusing opportunities to remarry, got a job and set out to raise her young daughter. And now, fifteen years later, the worst years were over. Though Maria's salary as a maid afforded few luxuries, it was reliable and it did provide food and clothes. And now Christina was old enough to get a job to help out.

Some said Christina got her independence from her mother. She recoiled at the traditional idea of marrying young and raising a family. Not that she couldn't have had her pick of husbands. Her olive skin and brown eyes kept a steady stream of prospects at her door. She had an infectious way of throwing her head back and filling the room with laughter. She also had that rare magic some women have that makes every man feel like a king just by being near them. But it was her spirited curiosity that made her keep all the men at arm's length.

She spoke often of going to the city. She dreamed of trading her dusty neighborhood for exciting avenues and city life. Just the thought of this horrified her mother. Maria was always quick to remind Christina of the harshness of the streets. "People don't know you there. Jobs are scarce and the life is cruel. And besides, if you went there, what would you do for a living?"

Maria knew exactly what Christina would do, or would have to do for a living. That's why her heart broke when she awoke one morning to find her daughter's bed empty. Maria knew immediately where her daughter had gone. She also knew immediately what she must do to find her. She quickly threw some clothes in a bag, gathered up all her money, and ran out of the house.

On her way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With the purse full of small black-and-white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things

that were before unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture – taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note.

It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village.

It was a few weeks later that young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth, but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. "Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home."

She did.

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being . . ."¹

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."²

¹ Hebrews 1:3

² Matthew 11:28

STUDY GUIDE

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Chapter One **For Longer Than Forever**

1. *Though we may not act like our Father, there is no greater truth than this: We are his. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ* (Romans 8:38-39).
 - A. Read Romans 8:38-39. What is unique about Paul's list?
 - B. Read Romans 8:1, 28 and 31. How do these verses echo the promise of verses 38-39?
 - C. How does Ephesians 5:1 fit into the theme of the Father's love for his children?
2. *We are his idea. We are his. His face. His eyes. His hands. His touch. We are him. Look deeply into the face of every human being on earth and you will see likeness.*
 - A. Examine these verses in light of Max's statement: 1 John 3:14, 23, 4:7-21.
 - B. How does Hebrews 12:14 relate to our kinship with all God's children?
 - C. Colossians 3:12-15 mentions positive attributes of believers. What are some steps you can take to put these "fruits of the spirit" in action?

Chapter Two **A Satisfied Thirst**

1. *False fountains pacify our craving with sugary swallows of pleasure.*
 - A. What are some of the "false fountains" Max is talking about? What is so dangerous about taking just a sip?
 - B. Have you ever fallen victim to pleasure? How can you guard against the enticement of "sugary swallows of pleasure"?
 - C. How was Susanna's gift of love like that of God's? In what ways are we like the thirsty child?
2. How does this chapter interpret the idea of righteousness? What would your own definition be?
 - A. Read Matthew 23:27-28. What was there about Pharisees' attitude about righteousness that made Jesus so angry?
 - B. According to Romans 3:10-31, what is the only way our "hunger and thirst for righteousness" can be "satisfied"?

- C. What is the ultimate reason that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled?

Chapter Three **Come Home**

1. *When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable.*
 - A. Do you agree with Max that, given the right circumstances, “a human will do things that were before unthinkable”? To what degree are each of us capable of the most heinous sins?
 - B. How would you describe humanity’s condition – basically good, basically evil, a product of the environment, a product of genetics? What do the following passages teach about the sinfulness of humanity: Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:9-23?
 - C. Why is it good for each of us to recognize our sinfulness? How does it affect our perspective on Christ’s sacrifice for us? How does it affect our understanding and forgiveness of other people?
2. *“Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn’t matter. Please come home.”*
 - A. In what way does Jesus make the same statement to us?
 - B. For you, which images in the following passages best illustrate a sinner’s journey and homecoming: Deuteronomy 4:29-31; Deuteronomy 30; Luke 15:3-10? How do they describe the sinner’s attitude? How do they describe God’s reception?
 - C. Describe a special homecoming you have experienced. What memories of it are most vivid? If an earthly homecoming can be so powerful, can you imagine what a heavenly homecoming is like?

BOLD LOVE

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